

The "Art of Defence. The Use,
Craftmanship, Decoration and Symbolism
of Defensive Equipment from the Late
Roman Age to the Early Post-Medieval
Period" – the 15th Edition of the Professor
Andrzej Nadolski International Arms and
Armour Colloquium in Sanok (2024)
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***THE ART OF DEFENCE. THE USE, CRAFTSMANSHIP, DECORATION AND SYMBOLISM
OF DEFENSIVE EQUIPMENT FROM THE LATE ROMAN AGE TO THE EARLY POST-MEDIEVAL
PERIOD – THE 15TH EDITION OF THE PROFESSOR ANDRZEJ NADOLSKI
INTERNATIONAL ARMS AND ARMOUR COLLOQUIUM IN SANOK (2024)***

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From 4 to 6 June 2024, almost five years after the previous event,¹ the 15th edition of the Professor Andrzej Nadolski International Arms and Armour Colloquium took place again in the halls of the Historical Museum in Sanok. Its organisers were, in addition to the above-mentioned Museum, the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Łódź, the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Łódź, the Archaeological Museum of the Middle Odra River Area in Świdnica near Zielona Góra, and the Museum of Folk Architecture in Sanok. This time, the conference was devoted to the issue of protective arms in the chronological framework covering the period from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period.

The organisers aimed to initiate a discussion on such issues as the evolutionary changes in armour over the centuries, the practical use of protective weapons, the techniques and centres of their manufacturing, the makers of these weapons, but also the symbolism and closely related decoration of armour. Furthermore, the intention was to reflect on the social reception of protective arms in the periods in question and to consider the problem of the

realism of the details of protective armour depicted in historical works of art.

The above-mentioned aim seems to have been achieved, as the lectures touched on all these issues. Of course, it was not possible to form a definitive picture of protective armaments over a period of almost 1,500 years on this basis. Still, their presentation was a huge dose of new information of both, a detailed and general nature. In total, the conference programme consisted of 21 papers and five posters and the conference was attended by 28 researchers (although initially the announced programme called for 38 participants) mainly from Poland, but also from Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The guests were welcomed by the Director of the Historical Museum in Sanok, Jarosław Serafin, PhD, and the first session of the proceedings began with an introductory paper by Alan Williams (University of Loughborough, UK) *When did Decoration Ever Take Precedence over Functional Efficiency?*, in which the author drew the conclusion that, in general, even when richly decorated, armour still had a high combat value – rather than being merely a sign of prestige. He was followed on the rostrum by Bartosz Kontny (University of Warsaw, PL), who, in his paper *Barbarian*

KEYWORDS

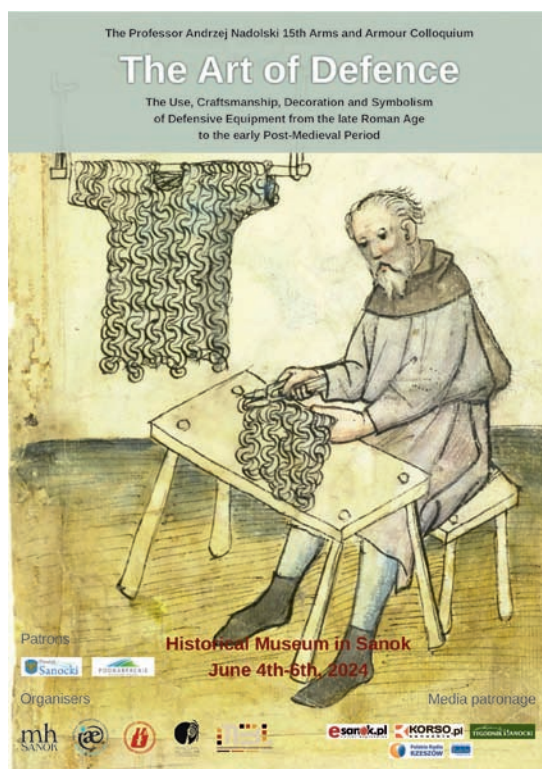
- Arms and Armour Colloquium
- defensive equipment
- late Roman Age
- the Middle Ages
- the early Post-Medieval Period
- decoration of weapon
- symbolism of weapon

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¹ Cf. Skupniewicz 2020.



Fig. 1. Official poster of the 'Professor Andrzej Nadolski International Arms and Armour Colloquium' in Sanok.



Shields in the Roman and Migration Period, Their Use, Decoration and Symbolism focused his attention on the shields used by the Barbarians in Late Antiquity, presenting specific examples of their size, construction, and decoration with which they were covered. An important part of this paper was also the presentation of fighting techniques using shields. The next paper, by Lech Marek (University of Wrocław, PL), titled *Late Medieval Armour in Silesia. Elite Apparel or Functional Object?* touched upon the problem of the ownership of armour pieces discovered in medieval Silesia. Was it only the armour of the elite, or should it be treated more broadly, as standard equipment of armed men of different social status? The answer to this question is currently ambiguous.

Archaeological finds of armour plates from the Vilnius Lower Castle area were presented by Paulius Bugys (National Museum – Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in Vilnius, LT) in his paper *Gilded Armour Plates from Vilnius Lower Castle: Origins and Interpretations*, reflecting on their origin. Among them are lamellar armour plates with traces of gilding, not seen anywhere else – undoubtedly products of a luxury nature. A magnificently ornamented suit of armour of Duke Nicholas VIII Radziwill of Nesvizh Castle, stored, among others, at The Art Institute of Chicago (USA), was the subject of another paper given by Jonathan Tavares, an employee of that institution. In his presentation *An Augsburg Armour Suit for A Radziwill Prince: A Reconstructive Analysis*, the author

attempted to analyse all available elements of this armour, pointing out problems in its reconstruction.

The afternoon session began with David Nicolle's (Royal Asiatic Society, London, GB), paper *The Representation of Armour in Medieval India*, which dealt with representations of armour in Indian art from regions unrelated to Islamic civilisation. Unfortunately, in many cases, the depictions analysed are so schematic that we are unable to say whether they show armour or clothes. The more realistic ones indicate the use of mainly mail and aketons, as well as lamellar and scales armour in the area. The next speaker, Valery Yotov (Varna Museum of Archaeology/Byala Town Museum, BL) talked about the early medieval armour from the Balkans, mainly Bulgaria (*The Early Medieval Defensive Equipment of the Balkans (Archaeological and Artistic Examples)*). The paper confronted the author's older findings, reported in his 2004 book,² with discoveries made in recent years, with a particular focus on elements of lamellar armour used in the area of the first Bulgarian state (681-1018).

This presentation was followed by Tomaž Lazar's (National Museum of Slovenia in Ljubljana, SL) paper *Armour in the Slovenian Lands During the High and Late Middle Ages*, showing the various influences and fashions that reached this land, which at that time was ruled by the Byzantine Empire. The contribution of the South German armament model, both in the few original relics and in iconographic representations, was particularly evident. After a short break, Mario Vignola (independent researcher, IT) presented an extremely interesting paper titled *Tomasso Missaglia and His Time: New Documents on the History of Milanese Armours* concerning the Milanese Missaglia armorial family and the documents concerning it stored in the Archivio di Stato di Milano. The author noted that, despite many years of research, it is still possible to find there a new and interesting information on armour-making in medieval Milan. The last speaker on the first day of the conference was Daniel Gosk (Castle Museum in Malbork, PL), who, in his paper *Winthentur Pavises in the Malbork Castle Museum over the Royal Armoury in Stockholm*, presented a pavise shield with the coat of arms of the city of Winterthur kept in the Malbork collection, which, in the course of recent research, turned out to be a modern copy of the original. The same is probably true of a pavise of this type stored in the Royal Armoury in Stockholm.

² Yotov 2004.



Fig. 2. Conference participants in front of the royal castle in Sanok.
Photo: D. Szuwalski.



Fig. 3. Jonathan Tavares during his speech.
Photo: D. Szuwalski.

The second day of the conference began with a talk titled *Thoughts on the Construction of Mail Armour arising from its Analysis* delivered by David Edge (The Wallace Collection in London, BG), who introduced the audience to new ‘non-invasive’ metallographic research techniques using neutron diffraction, presenting the example of studies of spike pieces of mail from different times. These not only allow us to achieve similar results to those provided by traditional methods but can also be used for highly mineralised objects. The following papers were also related to the problem of mail armour. Arkadiusz Michalak (Archaeological Museum of the

mid-Odra River Area in Zielona Góra, Świdnica, PL) together with Jiří Hošek (Archeologický ústav Akademie Věd ČR in Prague, CZ) in their paper *A Medieval Mail Hauberk from Krosno Odrzańskie. Notes on Construction and Technology*, presented the preliminary results of metallographic analysis of a medieval hauberk discovered in 2021 on the bank of the Oder River in Krosno Odrzańskie, composed of iron and copper rings. The authors noted that the individual rings differed both in the techniques of manufacturing and in the carbon content of the metal structure. On the other hand, in her presentation *Re-opening an Old Case: A Medieval*

Fig. 4. Conference participants during proceedings.
Photo: D. Szuwalski.



Mail in Obeliai (Lithuania) Cremation Grave, Sigita Mikšaitė (Lithuanian National Museum in Vilnius, LT) discussed finds of mail elements in Lithuanian graves from the 13th-15th centuries, including, above all, the largest fragment – most likely a mail with a sleeve – discovered in the Obeliai cemetery.

A similar theme was discussed by Tomasz Kurasiński (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Łódź, PL) in his paper *On Full Armour to the Afterlife? The Problem of the Occurrence of Armour Elements in Early Medieval Burial Grounds in Poland*. The researcher pointed out that relics of armour are extremely rare in early medieval graves in Poland and they are mainly small fragments of mail, but do not perform their original functions. The next presentation, by Piotr Strzyż (University of Łódź, PL), was devoted to the remains of armour (backplate and plates), already known from the literature, discovered during the research of a motte in Borówiek near Łowicz (*Remains of Armour from the Medieval Knight's Manor House in Borówiek near Łowicz*). The author focused mainly on the backplate, unique in Poland, the thickness of which was precisely measured at many points, and also talked about the attempt to determine the height of the person who wore it. Further studies of it are planned.

The next session opened with the presentation of five posters. Two of them concerned late Antiquity. Jarosław Gręda (University of Warsaw, PL) presented Germanic imitations of semi-circular Roman shield bosses (*Imitations of the Roman Shields from the Territory of Barbaricum*) and a team of researchers composed of Anna Lasota-Kuś (Institute of Archaeology

and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków, PL), Kalina Skóra (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Łódź, PL), and Joanna Zagórska-Telega (Jagiellonian University in Kraków, PL) focused their attention on new findings of miniature shields from Poland (*New Findings of Miniature Shields from Cemeteries of the Przeworsk and Wielbark Cultures*), which are found mainly in the graves of women and children. The miniature finds make it possible to reconstruct the shapes of shields used in Barbarian Central Europe.

A poster titled *Late Antique and Medieval Helmets from the Bulgarian Lands*, relating to the end of antiquity but also the Middle Ages, was presented by Yoto Valeriev (Burgas Museum, BL), who synthesised the archaeological finds of helmets and their components discovered in the Bulgarian lands, together with the dating of individual specimens. On the other hand, a late medieval relic was presented by Wojciech Kawka (Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, PL), Krzysztof Aniołek (Silesian University in Katowice, PL) and Grzegorz Żabiński's (Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, PL) poster dedicated to the metallographic analysis of a single coat of plate discovered in the area of a knight's manor house (*motte*) in Stare Tarnowice in Upper Silesia (*Coat of Plates Element from Stare Tarnowice*). The last poster was prepared by the aforementioned Allan Williams and concerned the metallographic study of magnificent objects: the tomb and helmet of the 'Black Prince' – Edward Woodstock, son of the English King Edward III Plantagenet (*The Tomb of the Black Prince*).

After the poster session, the main proceedings were reopened with a paper entitled *Lamellar and Scale Armour in the Halych-Volodymyr Duchy* by Piotr Kotowicz (Historical Museum in Sanok, PL). The researcher presented findings of elements of this type of armour from the West Ruthenia territories and emphasised that the spread of lamellar and scale armour in that area occurred primarily after the Mongol invasion, as a result of the adaptation of military fashion coming from the steppes. The last speaker of the day was Andrzej Janowski (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Szczecin, PL), who, in his talk *The Conversion of Saul from the Loitz Townhouse in Szczecin. An Overlooked Source from the Middle of the 16th Century on the History of Defensive Weapons* presented a previously poorly known iconographic source showing, among other things, two shields with depictions of human faces. These representations are so far the youngest known representations of this kind of shields, which were mainly known from late medieval iconography.

The third and final day of the conference began with a study of the armaments of the early medieval Yotvingians. Marcin Engel (Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, PL) presented a paper titled *Elements of Defensive Equipment as Grave and Sacrificial Offerings in the Yotvings Territory*, in which he introduced the audience to the findings of elements of helmets and fragments of mail from Yotvings graves and cult deposits from the settlements. This topic was also discussed by a research team composed of Ludwika Jończyk (University of Warsaw, PL), Grzegorz Żabiński, Tomasz Gorczyka (University of Silesia in Katowice, PL), and Krzysztof Aniołek, who presented in their paper *Mail Armour from Szurpiły in Yotvingia and its Metallurgy* a finding of a 12th-13th century fragment of mail from the 'Mosiężysko' cemetery in Szurpiły, and a metallographic analysis made for one link. It turned out that this link was made

of almost pure iron with an admixture of phosphorus, probably in the workshop of a local craftsman.

After the break, two more lectures were given. One of them – *Further Analysis of a Medieval Helmet and Brigantine Plates from the Collection of the Podlaskie Museum in Białystok* – by Adam Lech Kubik (University of Siedlce, PL) and Aleksander Piasecki (Podlaskie Museum in Białystok, PL), concerned a set of armaments, already pre-published,³ confiscated on the Polish-Belarusian border, which included a Golden Horde period helmet from the second half of the 14th century and coat of plates armour. Since their seizure, the artefacts have been subject to conservation which has allowed for more detailed investigations into their provenance and dating. The last presentation was delivered by Paweł Zaręba (independent researcher, PL), who, in his paper, *Codpieces as an Element of Renaissance Plate Armour. Examples from Figural Tombstones from Upper Silesia* focused his attention on a small but important element of armour, covering the intimate parts of the knights' bodies. The codpieces appeared in the iconographic sources from the 1620s cited by the author and were in use (at least in Silesia) until the first half of the 17th century.

It should be emphasised that almost all of the papers presented a high quality of content, so it is not surprising that after each block of presentations, they were the subject of lively discussions that also continued at the official banquet prepared by the organisers at the end of the first day of presentations. Guests were also acquainted with the rich exhibition offer of the Historical Museum in Sanok, including the armaments collection presented in the castle's 'Armoury.' The culmination of the second day of the academic conference was a rafting trip down the San River, ending with a bonfire. All the participants emphasised their readiness to publish the presented materials, which will be presented in the forthcoming issues of 'Acta Militaria Mediaevalia.'

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³ Kubik and Piasecki 2020.

